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Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Thomas **Schlesinger** (Austria)

Addendum

Programme questions

Proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

Programme 23. Public information

1. At its 13th meeting, on 11 June 1998, the Committee considered the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. It had before it proposals in respect of programme 23, Public information.

The representative of the Secretary-General introduced programme 23 and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. It was noted that, as information activities influenced the life of people everywhere, an accurate understanding of the work of the United Nations was important. Views were also expressed in support of the reorientation of the Department of Public Information.

4. While underscoring the importance of public information activities, members expressed the view that the proposed revisions should have included information activities concerning international cooperation, international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, environment and drugs. Further, the view was expressed that, as the focal point for information activities within the United Nations system, the Department of Public Information should be strengthened and that a strong information structure should be devised. Support was expressed for a stronger communication strategy to be devised by the

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Department and the need to strengthen the ties between the Department and substantive bodies within the Organization.

5. Regarding paragraph 23.10, it was pointed out that there existed a procedure through which the Economic and Social Council recognized representative groups of civil society, such as non-governmental organizations, by giving them consultative status to become actively engaged with the United Nations. It was suggested that it would be more appropriate to refer to the representative groups of civil society as major groups, so that such groups would be able to engage with the United Nations without having a consultative status with the Council.

6. Members expressed the view that electronic communication provided an effective means of communication and played an important role in information collection and dissemination. While the increased use of electronic communication was supported, concerns were expressed that there existed a considerable technological gap between Member States. It was, therefore, emphasized that other forms of media, such as radio, print and television, should be given equal importance. It was further pointed out that, while the use of electronic media was increasing, the more traditional means for the dissemination of information should continue to be used in view of the technological gap between Member States. It was also pointed out that ways and means for developing a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity for direct communication with United Nations constituencies should be explored.

7. Great importance was attached to the role of United Nations information centres in disseminating information at the local and regional levels.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee welcomed the development of digital technology, computerization and the Internet, and recommended that traditional media – print, radio and television – should continue to receive high priority to ensure outreach to all countries, in particular developing countries.

9. The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly the approval of the proposed revisions to programme 23, Public information, of the medium-term plan, subject to the following modifications:

(a) In the first sentence of paragraph 23.2, insert the phrase "and General Assembly resolutions 52/12 A of 12 November 1997 and 52/12 B of 19 December 1997," after "(A/51/950)";

(b) Add old paragraph 23.7 as paragraph 23.7 (bis) after new paragraph 23.7;

(c) In the first sentence of paragraph 23.8, replace the words "common system" by the words "United Nations system";

(d) At the end of paragraph 23.8, add the phrase "and the views of the host Governments";

(e) In paragraph 23.13, replace the word "celebrities" by the words "outstanding personalities".

10. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly invite the Secretary-General to conduct a review, in consultation with the host Governments, of the effectiveness of the functioning of the United Nations information centres, including those already integrated with other United Nations offices.